

Feline Arthritis

- Thinning of joint cartilage can lead to a vicious cycle of joint deterioration, reduced mobility, and pain.
- Supportive care is important, and treatment may include pain medication, NSAIDs, corticosteroids, supplements, massage, acupuncture, warm compresses, and/or surgery.
- Regular, moderate exercise may help delay feline arthritis.

What Is It?

Arthritis is a joint problem that can reduce mobility and cause pain. Arthritis can be caused by injury, infection, the body's own immune system, or developmental problems. The most common form of arthritis is called *osteoarthritis* (*osteo* = bone; *arthr* = joint; *itis* = inflammation) or *degenerative joint disease*. Normally, joints form smooth connections between bones. Osteoarthritis involves thinning of joint cartilage (a protective cushioning between bones), buildup of fluid within the joint, and the formation of bony growths within the joint. Over time, this can lead to reduced joint mobility as well as pain.

Signs and Diagnosis

Signs of arthritis include the following:

- Stiffness after exercise
- Wasting away of muscle
- Limited movement
- Joint swelling
- Trouble getting up, laying down, walking, climbing stairs, or jumping
- A grating sound in a joint

Recognizing arthritis in cats can be difficult because the condition progresses slowly, and cats don't complain about their aching joints. Also, some owners assume that signs of arthritis are "normal" in older animals.

Bringing your cat in for an annual checkup can help your veterinarian identify clinical signs early.

Radiography (x-rays) can reveal bony growths and joint abnormalities.

Treatment

- Getting or keeping your cat slim can help by decreasing the load on his or her joints.
- Feeding your cat the right amount of high-quality food should help with weight control.
- Carefully monitored exercise on soft surfaces can help affected cats. Ask your veterinarian for more details.
- Because arthritis is aggravated by the cold and damp, keep your cat warm and dry. Padded cat beds can help.
- Warm compresses can soothe affected joints.
- Massage can increase your cat's flexibility, circulation, and sense of well-being. Professional animal massage therapists are available.
- Pain medication, including nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (commonly called *NSAIDs*), may help relieve signs. Never give your cat a drug without your veterinarian's recommendation.
- NSAIDs are commonly prescribed by veterinarians to reduce pain and inflammation associated with arthritis.
- Corticosteroids can be used to suppress inflammation, but they are usually used for short periods.
- Disease-modifying osteoarthritis drugs (DMOADs) can be an important part of managing osteoarthritis.

Aids for Arthritic Cats

- Slip-free flooring
- Soft bedding
- Ramps (instead of steps)
- A warm, dry environment
- Help with grooming

Common Conditions

- Glucosamine and chondroitin have been used to help manage arthritis in animals.
- Acupuncture isn't just for people. It's painless and has shown some success in animals.
- Surgery may be a good choice in advanced cases of feline arthritis. Your veterinarian can tell you more.
- A low-stress environment, plenty of affection, and supportive care can help improve your cat's quality of life.

Prevention

Regular, moderate exercise and a high-quality diet can help delay aging, manage body weight, and keep your cat's musculoskeletal system in good

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shape. Ask your veterinarian to recommend an exercise program and a diet that are appropriate for your cat.

Many human and canine pain relievers are poisonous to cats.